

## **You're wrong, I'm Right, that's Light by LucyBrown45**

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**Summary:**

Billy's trouble. The sad kinda trouble. Jim's not sure he can fix that.  
A weekend falling in and out of right and wrong.

## **You're wrong, I'm Right, that's Light**

“Just sit there. Don’t move.” Jim Hopper puts his palm on the back of Billy’s head, gets him to lean forward, bridge of his nose against his folded forearms on the diner’s plastic table. He removes his hat by the peak, sets it by Billy’s elbow, grazed skin exposed through his ripped shirt. Jim slicks his finger through his hair, keeps his eyes half on the kid as he walks up to the counter. “Jesus Christ.”

He comes back with two steaming mugs of weak, bitter black coffee. He takes a great, tired lungful of stale late night air in through his mouth and holds it for a beat before letting it out in one long sigh, sitting down heavily across from Billy. He's still got his face down. His hair is a mess of matted curls.

Hopper turns his head to gaze around the diner. Just to look at something other than the disaster that is Billy Hargrove. Denise is organising cutlery loudly while Cliff talks to her through the open kitchen hatch about the eggs their chickens aren’t laying. She nods, but points her chin in the direction of the hot skillet with pancakes waiting to be turned. He waves his spatula at her. They’re a picture of domestic fulfilment. Jim looks back at Billy. He scratches at the underside of his chin, beard bristles rough against his fingers. He puts his hands flat on the table. “Kid. Sit up.”

When Billy doesn’t move, but makes a low groaning sound, a thread of panic needles it’s way through the veins of Hopper’s wrists. He reaches forward and takes Billy’s jaw in both hands. Gently pushes until Billy is somewhat upright. His eyes are hooded and there’s a sickly flush on his cheekbones. Jim smooths his large hands over the back of Billy’s skull and down his neck. Grips his shoulders once and again. “There we go. Look alive, kid.” He squeezes Billy’s biceps and gives him a coaxing shake for good measure. He picks up one of the mugs and places it directly into Billy’s hand.

The heat shocks him and he startles. A grace that Hopper hadn’t imagined Billy held, keeps the coffee from spilling and eyes flickering before looking alert, Billy takes a large swallow. He looks wrecked still. A cut at his temple weakly weeping, a twin wound at the corner of his mouth caught now with drops of coffee. Billy stares at him

with blank watery blue eyes. "Can I go?" He croaks.

Jim hands him a paper napkin and leans back in his seat. Suddenly exhausted. "Where you gonna go?"

Billy tips his head back and his thick brows furrow. His mouth opens as though to bite on his bottom lip in thought, before remembering the cut. "To Jess's. To Jesse's house. His house." His tongue slurs over the sibilance. He nods down at his coffee as though certain this is what is going to happen.

Hopper is fairly certain that Billy is suffering from concussion. He feels for the kid, but it is really bad timing. Friday night is the worst for taking anyone to the Emergency Department. He had been hoping to get home early too, so that he could be up in the morning to take Jane and Will to the hardware store.

They'd been put in charge of materials for the den the kids wanted to build. Which meant that Joyce was going to help them with the interior and Jim was supposed to know shit about wood and nails and glue? He had no idea. He'd tried to get Jonathan involved, but he'd laughed and said, "Nope, this one's on you, man." Before going back to covertly writing Nancy's name on a cardboard cassette liner.

Billy's glaring down at the blood on his fingertips where he'd pressed them against his temples to ease his aching head. Hopper hands him another napkin. Billy's shirt is unbuttoned, there's a sheen of sweat across his collarbones and his *Our Lady of Sorrows* pendant is stuck to his heaving breast. His normally bronzed skin has gone ashy.

"Imma. I'm gonna." Billy wriggles awkwardly in his seat.

Jim quickly gets up and grasps Billy around his shoulders. He gets Billy onto the floor and waves a hand at Denise. He sits behind Billy and pulls him back onto his chest. "Breathe deeply for me, kid." He grips the sides of Billy's thighs. "Lift your legs. Up onto the bench. There ya go."

This is not the first time that Hopper has had somebody go into shock on him in Denise and Cliff's diner. She hurries over with a plastic bucket and a blanket. As soon as the bucket is near Billy's head, he

promptly throws up in it. Frothing beer and not much else. Hopper's lip curls involuntarily, but he strokes his hand over Billy's forehead. "Good job. You're alright."

Cliff brings him a glass of water and helps Billy to take a mouthful, swilling and spitting. Cliff takes the blanket from his wife and tucks it around Billy. The kid is breathing heavily through his mouth and disorientated, is rubbing the side of his face against Hopper's chest. Jim can feel his thick eyelashes through his shirt.

Denise and Cliff hover. They don't all an ambulance. Ambulances mean trouble for a lot of people who frequent their diner. Bills mainly. But sometimes. Other demons. "How old is he?" Cliff's a softly spoken man. Curious, but cautious about the world. Enamoured with Jane and her friends. He loves baseball and the diner sponsors the local little league team.

Jim looks up at him, resigned. Shrugs. "Eighteen." Hopper only knows this fact by accident.

About a month ago, Max had been sat at his kitchen table jabbering away about a planned summer trip back to California. Hopper had asked if she was going to visit her dad. Max had wrinkled her nose and said, "No. Mom and Neil and me are going to drop Billy off at UCLA." She obviously hadn't really wanted to talk about the Billy element of the story, but when pushed had said, "He's eighteen, he could go by himself, but mom wants to see my Aunt Rose." Hopper had thought the whole thing sounded a bit off, but had let it go.

Denise ushers Cliff to sit in Hopper's vacated space on the bench. "Poor boy."

Hopper wishes he'd maybe asked more questions about Billy turning eighteen, about the acceptance to UCLA, about why he appeared to walk everywhere now. This is the fourth time Billy has found himself being apprehended by law enforcement in as many weeks. Hopper doesn't want to tell these kind-hearted people that.

Tonight, he'd been called out by Marnie at the gas station across the street. Billy had been making a drunken, loud attempt at shoplifting *Twinkies*. Leering at her over the counter pilfering day-old hot dog

buns outta the heat-cabinet next to the cash register. Jim had no intention of arresting Billy 'cause what kid steals bread if not a hungry one. But he'd had to do something with him because he had embarrassingly started screaming when Jim had approached. In a stupid turn of events, the concussion this 'poor boy', this lonely, angry kid has got is from him trying to punch Jim and instead driving his head into the corner of the shelving unit.

Jim taps Billy arms just above the elbow. "Billy?"

Billy moans in the affirmative.

"Do you think you're gonna be sick again?"

Billy rocks his head against Hopper's chest.

"Gonna need you to answer me, kid."

He doesn't open his eyes, but a begrudging, hoarse sound makes its way out of Billy's mouth, which Hopper takes.

"Okay. I'm gonna lay you down. Don't fall asleep. Okay?"

Billy's lips click, "Kay."

It's June, but still not warm enough for Jim to not be wearing his jacket. He stands and shrugs it off, rolls it up to tuck under Billy's head. He takes his coffee from the table and sips deeply.

"I'll get you a top-up." Denise pats his tummy as she walks to the kitchen.

She's a sweetheart. So is Cliff. "You got any weekend plans, Chief?"

Hopper tells him about the den. Frustratingly, it had been Karen Wheeler's idea. She wanted to get the kids out of her basement for the summer. Said it would be great to get them in the sunshine, playing outdoors.

Cliff says, "Speak to Sam at the hardware store. He'll know what to do. Plywood, probably." He pauses before thinking out loud, "But hey, that Wheeler kid is pretty smart. Can't he figure it out?"

On the floor, Billy rolls his head from side to side and weakly lifts his wrist.

Hopper huffs a laugh, like he figures he knows what Billy's thinking. "They're all pretty smart." He puts his now empty cup on the table and puts his hands on his hips. "I guess they're a bit old too. Should do this themselves."

Cliff shrugs. Denise arrives and splashes hot coffee from the glass pot into Hopper's mug.

Hopper grabs his hat from the table and says carefully, "It's different now, though. World's a more dangerous place."

Cliff and Denise hum in agreement and they all glance down at Billy whose eyes are half open and is pawing irritably at the scratchy blanket.

"Best get him off to hospital." Hopper takes a gulp of the steaming coffee. The hot burn feels good, waking him up. The night is late and it is cool enough that the thought of heading back out is enough to set-off the stirrings of a stomach ache. He kneels down and wraps his arms around Billy's torso. "Up we get."

Cliff steadies Billy on the other side, while Denise wraps the blanket around him. The boy is a solid weight. Hopper doesn't let Cliff help him manoeuvre Billy to the truck. Man's just recently had a mini-stroke. Denise walks behind them though and once Billy's settled in the passenger seat, she runs her fingernails through the curls at the front of his head to tidy him up a bit. Billy blinks slowly at her, not smiling, but looking soft and appreciative.

When the engine is running and they're a half a mile down the road, Jim flicks the radio on. He shakes Billy's knee. "You can't fall asleep, kid."

"M not asleep." He sits up and tips his head from side to side before wincing at the pain. "M not a kid."

"Sure. Who's the president?"

"Fuckin'." Billy rolls the window down. "Need a smoke." He leans

forward and messes with the radio dial. His brain feels all shook up. Revolving round inside his head. Hopper sighs and passes him a pack of *Marlboro Reds*. Lighter tucked inside.

He watches Billy fumble. "President?"

"Regan," Billy mumbles with a bent cigarette tucked between his lips. "Fuck." He snaps the lighter a few times before getting it. After a couple of hastily, shaking puffs Billy pushes the blanket from his knees and onto the floor.

Jim looks at him out the corner of his eyes. "Do your shirt up. You're in shock."

Billy scoffs and makes no move to do as he's told.

"You know where we are? Where we're going?"

Billy takes a hard suck at the cigarette. "We're not in fucking Kansas and you better not be taking me to the fucking hospital."

Jim presses his lips together and scratches at his wrist. "I'm taking you to the hospital."

"Stop the car."

Jim doesn't and Billy tosses the butt of his cigarette out the window, gets his seatbelt unbuckled and his fingers tucked into the door handle, before Jim brings the car to a screeching halt. "Jesus, kid. Have you got a death wish?" He's panting. He'd underestimated Billy. Kid's got something wild in him.

The radio continues chattering on, tinny nothing noise. Jim's breathing drowning it out. He closes his eyes, his mind spinning over a thousand scenarios that all end horrifically, catastrophically, terribly had Billy managed to open the door.

Billy doesn't say anything, but goes ahead and opens the door, making Jim gasp before his imagination catches up to reality and confirms they're not still hurtling seventy miles per hour. But Jim's not going to let him get away with it. He lunges to get tight grip on his shoulder. Billy swings a leg out and Jim leans in awkwardly,

heavily trapping Billy against the seat with his body, other hand holding somewhat pointlessly onto the edge of his tattered shirt. "You want me to arrest you?"

That settles him. Jim sits back slowly and warily watches Billy close the truck door. They sit in an uncomfortable silence before Billy's nose starts bleeding. Jim stretches over Billy's thighs to thrash through the contents of the glove compartment. He shoves a rumpled *Kleenex* box he finds stashed there into his hands and Billy dabs tentatively at his nostrils.

"Pinch your nose."

Billy does.

Jim rests a hand on the top of the steering and hangs his head before looking at Billy, touching his hand to his elbow to get him to clutch the tissues closer to his nose. He looks out the windscreen at the long, dark road ahead and again at the idiot in his passenger seat. "So. You hungry?"

Billy glowers at him through slit eyes, but stays quiet and diligently holds his nose while Hopper drives, eventually pulling up to *Burger Chef*. "I'm going to lock the doors, so don't do anything stupid." He does as he promises, takes a couple of steps backwards, points at Billy. "I'm coming back."

In the dark of the Chief's truck, Billy tries not to think about what happens next. He doesn't want Hopper's pity meal. A condemned man's last supper. Billy sneers at his own theatrics. His dad probably wouldn't kill him. Probably. He hasn't so far. Billy thinks he's done worse than collapse on a cop. He did say some pretty nasty shit to Hopper, but maybe he'll let that slide. Maybe Billy can make it up to him.

He presses his middle fingers into the crease between his neck and the edge of his head. It hurts something chronic. He exhales heavily, bottom lip jutting out. He lifts his shoulders up and down a few times. He's tired of having to make it up to people. People never try to make it up to him, even when they damn well should. Like that fucking liar, Steve Harrington.



Billy's not even sure what he said to Hopper. Even if he was sure, maybe it's all true. Billy thinks about the insults he usually hurls at the back of cops, mutters under his breath driving past their cars. Maybe Jim Hopper is a lousy, crooked faggot pig.

Jesus Christ. Billy presses his forehead against the window. He's been lucky so far. All the other times he's found himself in the Hawkins's Police Department, they'd let him walk out. Now though, stuck in Hopper's truck it seems inevitable that he's going to get a personal escort back home and straight into his dad's fists. He presses the palms of his hands into his eyes.

"I got you a Pepsi and a milkshake. I figure you need the sugar." Jim puts a cup in each of Billy's hands. He stares sceptically down at them. The parking lot is dark and in the orange light from the stripmall the kid looks weathered. Beat down. There's dried blood spackled across his cheek and Jim sighs. "Come on. Drink up and I'll give you a burger." The packaging rustles in his lap as unwraps his own. He dials the radio away from the local station. Some late night disk jockey is playing *Sweet Dreams*.

The kid puts the *Pepsi* on the floor, between his feet and reaches over the consol between them and grabs a burger from the box. Sucking obnoxiously on the milkshake straw, he raises an eyebrow at Jim before sinking his teeth around a hefty bite. He chews with his mouth open. Milk and meat. "Wha'd'ya get strawberry for?"

Jim grimaces at the sight. Teenage boys are gross. "What's wrong with strawberry?"

"Chocolate's better."

Jim sips at his own milkshake. Looks straight ahead. The sky is inky, morning sleepily thinking about turning over. He likes strawberry. He points at the glove compartment. "There's Tylenol in there," he says.

Billy manages to shove the remaining third of the burger into his mouth. He thrusts the milkshake at Hopper in order to sift through the junk and find the tablet packet. He pops the painkillers from the silver foil, quickly swallowing with a swig of *Pepsi*. He relaxes into his seat, taking his cup back from Hopper and for several long

minutes contentedly takes alternates sips.

Jim watches him fascinated and amused. He's trying not to laugh, but Billy looks like a Labrador whose been given a tennis ball and his favourite chew toy. Billy catches he's being watched and turns to glare at Hopper's smirk, which only cracks him up. Billy asking, "What?" incredulously over Jim's cackle.

"Nothing, kid." He ruffles Billy's hair, but what with being careful to avoid Billy's cut and gentle in the knowledge that Billy's head must be pounding, it's more of a soft pet.

"Hey, man, don't do that." Billy points at him, but it only makes Jim start laughing again. He's not sure where the Californian gangster's gone. Sat here is an adorable, abandoned puppy.

Billy huffs and goes back to his soda and his milk. Jim tips his head back and howls with unexpected uncontrollable laughter. He grips the steering wheel tightly in both hands, trying to get himself together. He opens the window and wipes his eyes. "Sorry, kid." He whistles out a shallow breath and lights a cigarette. "Sorry." He grins at Billy. He passes him what's left of his burger, raising his eyebrows. Peace offering. Billy noisily drains the last of milkshake, drops the empty cup on the floor and takes it.

Jim rolls his eyes. He waits for Billy to finish eating. The radio is playing *Yazoo*. It's awful. Jim's too tired to mess about trying to find something different and Billy doesn't seem bothered by it. "Okay." He waits for Billy to look at him. "I won't take you to the hospital."

Billy swallows thickly, eyes not leaving Hopper's.

"But, that head of yours." Jim rubs the pads of his fingers against his mouth in thought. "I don't want you falling asleep." He's not particularly proud of his plan, but something about the night or this kid is making it hard for him to think, *what would Chief Hopper do?*

"We'll go to my house." He turns the engine on. "And watch *Blade Runner*. Then *Jaws 2*." He starts driving. Flicks his head at Billy who gets the hint and puts his seatbelt on. Talking more to himself now than to the kid. "Then it'll be morning." He clears his throat. Pounds

his fist on his chest a couple of times. "Actual morning. We'll go to the drop-in centre. Then you can help the kids build the fucking den."

Billy snorts and ducks his head. Jim looks at him. His guarded smile makes him seem both ancient and so full of innocent relief that a sad vice clenches in Jim's sternum. Just for a moment.

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Billy's not asleep, but he's got his eyes closed and feels vaguely floaty. His head doesn't feel great, but he finally feels comfortable, relaxed with it tipped back against Hopper's soft couch that has melded to every curve of Billy's body. Now though, someone or something is trying to interrupt that. He can sense eyes on him. Dragging him up from the depths of his swimming pool semi-consciousness.

A small hand closes over his forearm and his flesh creeps like his body wants to flinch away, but is disconnected from his brain and so stays still. Fight or flight deactivated. With a strength of superhuman effort he takes a lifetime to peel open his eyes. The owner of the small hand is a small girl with massive brown eyes and dark curls that rival his own unkempt locks.

"Hello," she says.

He finds he can't say anything back.

"Breakfast," she says.

She scoots back, but her hand is still on his arm so he's forced to move with her. His limbs feel molasses-lead. The tiny child helps him to his feet. The hardwood floor is cold under his bare soles and the shock of gravity kicks his brain into action. He breathes in deeply and stretches his arms over his head. Jim's too big *Hoosiers* jersey scrunching at his shoulders. He bends over and holds his knees to crack his back. As he follows the girl to the kitchen, he folds Jim's sweatpants over at the waist to keep them from slipping.

Christ. In the light of day, Billy does not look like a harmless ball of fluff in need of protecting. He looks like a strung-out Steve McQueen.

Dashing in way that's dangerous for an eighteen year old. Too much, too soon. Jim tucks a dishtowel into the waistband of his jeans and brings the frying pan with eggs over to the table as Jane and Billy sit down.

He dishes up, gaze hovering around Billy who is slumped in his seat like he might topple out of it. Blue eyes lowered, mouth tilted that suggest he's probably still not quite with it yet, but that his quick mind has catalogued and begun spiderwebbing how Jim's shoulder's stiffen at the sight of Billy in his clothes.

Billy forks eggs into his mouth like Hopper might take them away again and he steals the toast Jane is evidently not eating from her plate. She watches him. Jim knows that look. Knows that Billy is about to gain a new friend.

"I like your earring."

Billy grins slowly at her. He recognises her now. Friend of Max's. "Jane?" He steals her strawberry yogurt and Jim clucks his tongue. She smiles and wiggles happily.

Jim claps his hands. "Finish those eggs, Jane. Billy – Shower." He jabs his thumb over his shoulder.

"You made me shower last night." Billy's tongue peeks out as he finishes his sentence, realises how it could sound as it arrives.

Jim sighs. "Whatever. Do what you want, kid."

Jane giggles. It's fine. Jim knows he's going to get the last laugh 'cause the jeans he's found for Billy are definitely Steve Harrington's. Left here because Steve leaves his shit everywhere he goes. And Jim's not going to tell either of them. And it's going to be damn hilarious.

Steve's jeans turn out to be too small for Billy and Jim with his hands on his hips has to watch as Billy wanders his bedroom searching for what he deems an appropriate belt to hold up a pair of Jim's. Billy gets his fingers all over Jim's photo frames and into the pages of the detective novels he'd rather people didn't know he reads. Billy doesn't say anything, but his lips crook shyly in what Jim thinks

might be happy gratitude at being allowed.

He must be feeling delicate because he raids Jim's closet for a warm, blue sweater. "Ready."

"How's your head?"

Billy shrugs. Touches his fingers to the sticking plaster Jim had put there. Trails them down to his split lip that only so much iodine can be good for.

Jane sits up front for the ride to the drop-in centre. Billy grouches about it, but is soon appeased when she puts a *Led Zepplin* tape on. She's okay, he reckons.

The doctor is an old friend of Jim's and Billy doesn't like the way he looks at him. Like he's some nobody criminal that Hopper dragged out the *Wabash*. Billy sits rigidly while call me Dr. Ben presses new bandages to Billy's head. Cleans his elbow. Listens to his heart. Frowns at the bruises on his ribs and at the back of his hips.

Dr. Ben sits with his chin in his hand and observes Billy with the face of a man who wants Billy to go to a nice foster home or meet some nice friends or just be nice and Billy now eighteen and knowing it's too late for nice says, "Can I go?"

The sleeves of the sweater cover his hands and flap as Billy swings his arms in a fierce walk. Halfway across the parking lot, Jim strides up and puts his arm around Billy's shoulders and Billy lets him.

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It turns out that Sam doesn't work on Saturdays. Will looks up at Hopper with round eyes, worried they'll never get the den built. Billy's got his arms folded, smouldering cigarette dangling from his lips in the hardware store's yard, highly bored. Feeling the lurking burn of irritation 'cause he's damn sleepy and Dr. Ben jackass had said he couldn't sleep until his usual bedtime. Which was a kick in the fucking teeth.

He wonders where Max is. If she's part of this den building nightmare. He wonders if she'll eventually show up and then he can

take her home and that'll be that. Good big brother Billy bringing Maxine home from weirdo Steve's house. That'll sound like a solid excuse. All night searching for her. She was home? Huh. Go figure. That'll fly. Maybe.

Jim's pinching the bridge of his nose, while Will and Jane make grabby hands at a toppling column of timber planks. Billy squints at them. They really are very small for thirteen year olds. He watches as Jim bends over to help pick them back up. He looks normal without his uniform, in denims that fit surprisingly well. Cosy green t-shirt. Kinda friendly. Like a fucking Indiana dad. Billy scowls.

He rolls his sleeves up and swiftly takes the boards from the three of them, stacking them neatly. "You need sheet plywood. There." He points back over near the entrance. "Get a cart for it."

Will, who had so far tried to stay as far away from Billy as possible, hiding behind Jane at times, suddenly jumps with unannounced glee and says in a voice that's louder than Billy ever would have expected, "Thanks, Billy." His stupid hair bouncing as he runs in the right direction, Jane catching up.

Hopper puts his hand high on Billy's back between his shoulder blades and whispers close to her ear, "Now, aren't you glad you came along?" He dodges the elbow Billy throws out towards him and laughs as he follows the kids. Billy trundles behind, picking up nails from a display bucket as he goes.

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Fucking Mike Wheeler has a blueprint for the den. Which Max and Lucas seemed unconvinced by, but a very small part of Billy can appreciate. But his eyes itch with the need to sleep, so he's not fucking about cutting out window and door holes. He's feeling a bit woozy, he keeps zoning out watching Hopper's gentle smile, easy even though he must be as tired as Billy. He decides it's probably not safe for him to be holding a nail gun, so he sets it down and wanders into the house.

He needs a drink. He's wiping his mouth from slurping water straight outta the kitchen tap, when the front door bangs open and Goddamn

Steve Harrington and that carcrash of a kid with the dumb mouth pour into the living room with take-out bags from *Merrill's*. Billy wants to be angry at the sudden presence of Harrington, but he's mostly just jealous at the sight of the cheerful green logo on their loot, because he knows there's nothing in there for him and *Merrill's* makes the closest thing to a good pastrami sandwich.

Dustin, assessing the situation quicker than Steve, grabs the bag from Steve's hand and runs outside with it. Steve and Billy stare at each other. Billy hears Hopper's clumping boots step into room before he doubles over and hurls up all over Jim's nice rug. His vision goes a bit blurry, but when he's done, he realises that both Harrington and Hopper are holding his hair, gently touching his back. He wipes his eyes. Jim's rug isn't that nice. No wonder nobody's yelling or pushing him out.

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Billy wakes up his head thick with a fuzzy kinda guilt. Shit. He fell asleep. And ruined Hopper's rug. Didn't finish the den either. Hopper's alarm clock says it's gone nine in the evening. He didn't take Max home. Shit. Somebody has put him back in Hopper's jersey and sweatpants. He's warm, but sticky with a bad nap's sweat down his back. His head hurts. He can't stay here though, in Hopper's bed.

He stumbles out into the living room. At the sound of him, dragging his hand over the wall to stay balanced, Jim leans an elbow over the back of the couch. "Hey, bud." He beckons Billy, fingers curling into his palm. "C'mon." Jim's speaking softly, like Jane might already be in bed, like he doesn't want to scare Billy off.

Billy looks at the floor as he sits down next to Jim. The rug looks okay. Jim doesn't seem worried. He's watching *Jaws 2* again. It's late back to the video store so he wants to get his money's worth. In any case, he had to keep talking over it last night to keep Billy awake. He's not sure how it ends.

"Sorry about the rug."

"The wha-. Oh. Kid, it's a rug. Don't sweat it. How's your head doing?"

Billy nods.

Jim says, "You hungry?" He gestures at the coffee table littered with empty and full juice boxes. "You want a drink?"

Billy shrugs and without really meaning too shuffles close to Jim's warmth. Billy's not cuddling Jim. He's just sat very close. With his head on Jim's chest. It feels good. Safe. Like when Jim made sure he didn't fall straight onto the diner floor. Held him while he threw up. Twice. It's a good spot to stay outta trouble.

Jim gets Billy tucked up under his arm, hand smoothing over his bicep. They watch the movie in quiet for a bit before Billy mumbles, "Did ya build the den?"

Jim squeezes Billy's shoulder, leans his chin on the top of his head. "No," he sighs. "They wanted to wait for you."

Billy tips his head back to look Jim in the eyes. "Really?"

"Mhmm." Jim nods. "They came in here instead and played *Parcheesi*."

Billy puts his head back down on Jim's chest. Pulls his knees up so that they rest on Jim's lap. "With Steve?"

Jim chuckles. "Yeah, with Steve." He brings his other arm around Billy, encasing him in a tight hug. "You and him have a lot in common."

Billy makes a derisive sound and goes to stand up, but Jim keeps him still. "No, c'mon. Listen. You're both hot-headed. You charge in before thinking. Stubborn. Too damn fierce for your own good. But. You are good. When the mood strikes. You're both good kids."

"You ever do this with him?"

Billy tilts his head to the side. Looks at Jim from under his eyelashes. He figures he must still look pretty wrecked what with the concussion, but he knows that with his eyes gone docile, mouth pouty, *forgive me I am thoughtless, care for me I'm careless*, it's a look that often gets him what he wants. He waits for Jim to come to him.



He doesn't. "Kid. You are going to meet so many amazing people at UCLA."

Billy jerks. "Who told you about UCLA?"

"Max."

"Well. I'm not going."

Jim sighs into the dip of Billy's collarbones. "Sure you are." He holds Billy's knees. "I know." He touches the tip of his middle finger to Billy's jaw. "I know that getting there is going to feel like you're beating your head against a brick wall for the next three months. But then it'll be over. And you'll be there. In California."

Billy kisses him. Hesitantly, a tapping push of his lips against Jim's. Jim presses their foreheads together. He thinks about how this is probably the first time in years anybody has paid attention to Billy. Attention that hasn't been given or returned in violence. Thinks about how he too just wants some attention, some comfort.

Jim lifts him, cradles him close to his chest and Billy's legs dangle either side of his hips.

It's safe here. Under Jim's soft, warm weight in Jim's big, warm bed. Jim's huge hands cupping the back of his neck, thumbs stroking the underside of his chin. Excitement tickles at the base of his spine and low in his tummy pleasure trickles and thrums from his cock. He feels wanted, feels good. Feels good about feeling good. Not shamefully trying to hide his need. Not being embarrassed about wanting.

He opens his mouth wider, letting Jim slide his tongue along his. Wetly licking at the backs of his front teeth. Billy laughs quietly in the back of his throat and rocks his hips up to meet Jim's thrust into him. Jim moans at that. Smooths his nose over Billy's cheek, kisses his neck.

Billy wraps his arms around Jim's waist and pulls his knees up, pulling Jim closer, letting him go deeper. He does, but so slowly Billy feels like he might die. He sits up slightly and Billy whines, but Jim settles him as his hands grip the back of Billy's thick thighs, angle

changing to make Billy squeeze his eyes shut, lips parted in a dirty smirk.

He's beautiful. Fucking Christ. Billy's skin is burning everywhere Jim touches him. His tight hole, the hottest thing of all. Jim watches as his dick works in and out, deliberately dragging to make Billy wait his turn. He can't and reaches up to pluck at his dark nipples, which makes Jim groan at the sight. Reaches with the other hand for Jim's shoulder, bringing him close to kiss again. He bites at Jim's bottom lip when he takes a hand away from Billy's thigh and begins jerking him off, fast to match his quickening hips.

They come together. Billy's voice stuttering around Jim's name, while Jim pants wetly into the slope of his neck. Jim pulls out carefully. Gives a tiny clutch at Billy's soft hips, promising to be back, before going to bathroom. Condom disposing, washcloth fetching. He lies down and faces Billy, pulling him in. Tucks the thick tartan blanket around them. Breathes in the scent of them, of his shampoo in Billy's hair, of shared cigarettes. Tangles their ankles together and roughs his hand through Billy's golden curls. As Billy shifts so that flat plain of his abs press against Jim's tummy, he hums contentedly, "This is nice. Don't move."